

WHAT IS CLAIMED, IS

1. A method for selectively controlling access to programs, comprising:

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    setting a rating limit corresponding to a first user
input;

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setting an exception to said rating limit
corresponding to a second user input;

receiving information for identifying a program and
10 for specifying a rating of said program;

comparing said rating of said program with said
stored rating limit;

determining whether an exception to said rating limit
has been set for said program identified by said received
15 program identifying information; and

controlling access to said program in response to the results of the steps of comparing and determining.

2. The method in accordance with claim 1, wherein said
20 information for specifying at least one rating of a
program and for identifying said program is received
together with said program.

3. The method in accordance with claim 1, wherein said
25 programs are television programs and wherein said
rating limits are used in a parental control system.

4. The method in accordance with claim 2, wherein said television programs are received as an analogue television signal and said ratings are received embedded in the vertical blanking interval of said analogue television signal.

5. The method in accordance with claim 3, wherein the ratings define the age of the viewer the program is designed for, the degree of a certain program content,
5 or a combination thereof.
6. The method in accordance with claim 1, wherein said exceptions from said rating limits define programs which shall be blocked or enabled independently to said
10 set rating limits.
7. The method in accordance with claim 6, wherein a never block program list specifies certain programs that should never be blocked, even if these programs exceed the rating limits.
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8. The method in accordance with claim 6, wherein an always block program list specifies certain programs that should always be blocked, even if these programs do not exceed the rating limits.
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9. The method in accordance with claim 6, wherein said exceptions are specified by metadata describing said programs like the program title, actor name, director
25 name or topic.
10. The method in accordance with claim 9, wherein said metadata specifying said exceptions are selected by the user from a dedicated list of metadata.
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11. The method in accordance with claim 9, wherein program titles specifying said exceptions are selected

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by the user from a displayed EPG program schedule.

12. The method in accordance with claim 9, wherein said
metadata specifying said exceptions are selected by
5 marking a currently displayed program.

13. The method in accordance with claim 12, wherein the program title of the currently displayed program is stored as exception from said rating limits.

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14. The method in accordance with claim 12, wherein an
overview of metadata describing the currently displayed
program is displayed to the user and wherein one or
more of said metadata are selected by the user and
15 stored as exceptions from said rating limits.

15. The method in accordance with claim 6, wherein a set exception is valid for any following episode of a program series.

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16. A method for selectively controlling the viewing of television programs, comprising:

25 setting rating limits in a parental control system
for television programs corresponding to first user
inputs, wherein said rating limits generally define
whether television programs are to be blocked or are
enabled for viewing;

30 setting exceptions from said rating limits for
certain television programs corresponding to second user
inputs;

storing said rating limits and exceptions from said rating limits for certain television programs;

receiving television programs with embedded information for specifying recommended ratings and for identifying said television program;

extracting said embedded information;

5 comparing said recommended ratings with said stored rating limits;

checking with said information for identifying said television program whether an exception from said rating limits for certain television programs has been set;

10 blocking the viewing of a specific television program either if said rating limits indicate that said specific television program is to be blocked and no exception from said rating limits for said specific television program is set or if said exception from said rating limits indicate
15 that said specific television program is to be blocked; and

enabling the viewing of a television program either if said rating limits indicate that said specific television program is not to be blocked and no exception
20 from said rating limits for said specific television program is set or if said exception from said rating limits indicate that said specific television program is not to be blocked.

25 17. Apparatus for selectively controlling access to programs, comprising:

means for setting a rating limit corresponding to a first user input;

30 means for setting an exception to said rating limit corresponding to a second user input;

means for receiving information for identifying a program and for specifying a rating of said program;

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means for comparing said rating of said program with said stored rating limit;

means for determining whether an exception to said rating limit has been set for said program identified by said received program identifying information; and

means for controlling access to said program in response to the results of the steps of comparing and determining.

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